

Speeding in Finland Can Cost a Fortune, if You Already Have One

By SUZANNE DALEY – APRIL 25, 2015

HELSINKI, Finland — Getting a speeding ticket is not a feel-good moment for anyone. But consider Reima Kuisla, a Finnish businessman. He was recently fined 54,024 euros (about \$58,000) for traveling a modest, if illegal, 64 miles per hour in a 50 m.p.h. zone. And no, the 54,024 euros did not **turn out to be** a mistake of any kind.

Mr. Kuisla is a millionaire, and in Finland the fines for more serious speeding infractions are calculated according to income. The thinking here is that if it **stings** for the little guy, it should sting for the big guy, too.

The ticket had its desired effect. Mr. Kuisla said he was seriously considering leaving Finland altogether, a position to which he held firm when reached by phone at a bar. “The way things are done here makes no sense,” Mr. Kuisla **blurted out**, saying he would not be giving interviews. Before hanging up, he added: “For what and for whom does this society exist? It is hard to say.”

“This says a lot about the times when the **stinkingly rich** can’t even take their fines for crimes, but are immediately moving out of the country. Farewell, we won’t miss you,” said one post in The Helsingin Sanomat, a daily newspaper and website.

The Nordic countries have long had a strong egalitarian **streak**, embracing progressive taxation and high levels of social spending. Perhaps less well known is that they also practice progressive punishment, when it comes to certain fines. A rich person, many citizens here believe, should pay more for the same offense if justice is to be served. The question is: How much more?

At the University of Helsinki, Jussi Lahti, 35, a graduate student in geography, said that he could understand why Mr. Kuisla was upset, but that he considered the principle of an equal percentage fair. And, he added, Mr. Kuisla “had a choice when he decided to speed.”

The size of Mr. Kuisla’s ticket nonetheless **drew** considerable **attention** here as television shows and newspapers debated the merits of Finland’s system, which uses a complex formula based on income to calculate an individual’s fines. Some wondered whether the government should stop imposing such fines for infractions at relatively low speeds. Some suggested that a fine so big was really a form of taxation.

But the idea that the rich should pay heavier fines did not seem to be much in question. “It is an old system,” said Pasi Kemppainen, chief superintendent at the National Police Board. “It may lead to high fines, but only for people who can afford it.”

Mr. Kuisla, a betting man who owns a real estate empire, was clocked speeding near the Seinäjoki airport. His fine was then calculated from his 2013 income, 6,559,742 euros, or more than \$7 million at current exchange rates.

Someone committing a similar offense and earning about 50,000 euros a year, or \$54,000, none of it capital gains, and with no young children, would get a fine of about 345 euros, or about \$370. Someone earning 300,000 euros (\$322,000), would have to pay about 1,480 euros (\$1,590).

Adapted from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/26/world/europe/speeding-in-finland-can-cost-a-fortune-if-you-already-have-one.html?_r=0